

Focus on **Beyond Waste**

Strategic Plans for Solid & Hazardous Wastes

From Ecology's Beyond Waste Project

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is developing long-range strategic plans for decreasing solid and hazardous wastes, increasing recycling, properly managing wastes that remain, and reducing the use of toxic substances. The Hazardous Waste and Toxic Reduction Program and the Solid Waste and Financial Assistance Program are working together on this project, named "Beyond Waste."

The components of the project include the "Beyond Waste Summary Document" and background information papers. Together they constitute the "State Hazardous Waste Plan," and the "State Solid Waste Plan." Citizens worked in partnership with Ecology to give the Beyond Waste project its 30-year vision: *We can transition to a society where waste is viewed as inefficient, and where most wastes and toxic substances have been eliminated. This will contribute to economic, social and environmental vitality.*

State law (RCW 70.105 and 70.95) requires Ecology to develop statewide solid- and hazardous-waste plans and to update them regularly. The purpose of these plans is to provide statewide guidance for reducing our use of toxic substances, decreasing waste generation, and properly managing any wastes that remain.

Why these strategic plans are needed now

Overall, the amount of waste we dispose of is on the rise, despite massive recycling programs and pollution-prevention efforts. We are using natural resources much faster than nature can replenish them. After we have used resources extracted from the earth's surface, we discard them, often in more harmful forms, back into the environment. Humans depend on this same environment to provide water to drink, air to breathe and soil to grow food.

Concerned with community safety, the public is becoming more aware of how much hazardous material is hauled by road, rail and sea. Given the dangers of these substances, whether they are new products or waste, the risk of accidents climbs as the volume transported continues to grow.

The average person in Washington creates about 35 pounds of hazardous waste and 4,084 pounds of non-hazardous waste a year.* Handling any waste is expensive and potentially hazardous. Exposure to certain chemicals, whether as waste or in the products we use, may pose greater risks to health, air, water and land than previously believed.

Left unchecked, the situation will become much worse. The responsible approach is reducing toxic-substance use, eliminating waste when possible, and using the remaining resources more efficiently.

* Hazardous waste statistic taken from "Reducing Toxics in Washington: 2000 Annual Progress Report," Ecology publication number 02-04-034. Solid Waste statistic calculated from figures in "Solid Waste in Washington State-12th Annual Status Report," Ecology publication number 03-07-019.

Results

The plans focus on leading the way to a future where we will use fewer materials and toxic substances to support the needs of our society; a future where we re-use or recycle materials rather than incinerate or bury them. This shift will take place as we redesign processes, change consumer and corporate behaviors, re-use more materials, and improve technologies. Business and government at all levels will need to capitalize on existing successful programs and invest in infrastructure and activities to meet these future goals.

Moving beyond waste to resource re-use and toxic-substance reduction will take many years. In the meantime, we must maintain or improve our current waste-handling systems.

Opportunities to participate

Ecology is committed to working collaboratively on the hazardous-waste and solid-waste plans with people and organizations interested in waste-related issues. Over the last three years, a series of meetings have produced comments and ideas on the plans. Before drafting the plans, Ecology employees talked with citizens, businesses, local governments and others to ensure that their concerns were addressed in the draft plans. These ideas include:

- Constructing buildings that don't harm the environment.
- Reducing and, where possible, eliminating hazardous industrial and household wastes.
- Recycling more organic wastes.
- Measuring environmental progress more effectively.

In early May 2004, Ecology issued drafts of their 30-year plans for handling and reducing solid and hazardous waste, and toxic-substance use as part of the Beyond Waste project. Ecology introduced these draft plans with a series of public meetings that encouraged public understanding and dialogue.

Ecology continues to encourage interested parties to provide feedback on the draft plans in two convenient ways. First, an electronic comment form is linked to the Summary Document for use in sending written comments to Ecology via the internet. Second, a number of e-mail addresses are provided in the Summary Document and on the Web site for submitting questions or comments. **Ecology will accept comments through August 13, 2004.** We hope you will take advantage of one of the opportunities to share your thoughts and ideas with us about the Beyond Waste Project. Ecology will issue the final plans in the fall of 2004.

For updates and information about the Beyond Waste project, log onto www.ecy.wa.gov/beyondwaste. The Web site contains information about both the hazardous-waste and the solid-waste plans.

You can also contact either Chris Chapman (hazardous-waste plan) at 360-407-7160 or Cheryl Smith (solid-waste plan) at 360-407-6654.

If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact the Solid Waste & Financial Assistance Program at 360-407-6900 or TTY (for the speech or hearing impaired) at 711 or 1-800-833-6388.